

Khaksar and Jallianwala Bagh Massacres: The Bloodbaths that Ignited the Freedom Movement

By Nasim Yousaf

The cold-blooded massacre of Khaksars in Lahore and the Jallianwala Bagh incident in Amritsar took place on March 19, 1940 and April 13, 1919 respectively. The two tragedies occurred in cities in Punjab that are only 31 miles (50 km) apart. The Khaksar and Jallianwala Bagh massacres not only brought country-wide resentment against the British Raj, but also sparked the Indian sub-continent's (now comprised of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh) freedom movement, which led to the fall of British rule in 1947.

On March 19, 1940, a uniformed contingent of 313 members of the Khaksar Movement (Khaksar Tehrik) marched in protest against restrictions imposed on their activities. Despite the fact that they were *parading peacefully*, police - headed by Donald Gainsford (Senior Superintendent of Police, Lahore), P. C. D. Beaty (Deputy Superintendent of Police), and Frederick Chalmers Bourne (District Magistrate) – showed up to stop the protest. Gainsford “slapped Inayat Shah [the Khaksar contingent’s leader] in the face” for not following his

orders to abandon the protest march. Deputy Superintendent of Police Beaty then shouted “Maro, Fire Karo” (attack and fire). The police then opened fire and, according to witnesses, indiscriminately killed over 200 Khaksars (the official figure intentionally underreported the death toll to be in the 30’s) and injured many others. According to the police station clerk’s (*Moharir*, who is required to record all happenings) register, 1,620 rounds were issued to the police force under Beaty on March 19, 1940 and only 1,213 returned, which in itself speaks to the tremendous number of martyred and injured Khaksars. This Khaksar massacre took place at a pivotal moment in the sub-continent’s history, as Allama Mashriqi was on the verge of toppling British rule. The police actions were considered to be an aggressive and brutal maneuver to try and stop Mashriqi and the Khaksars.



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The KASHMIR MONITOR

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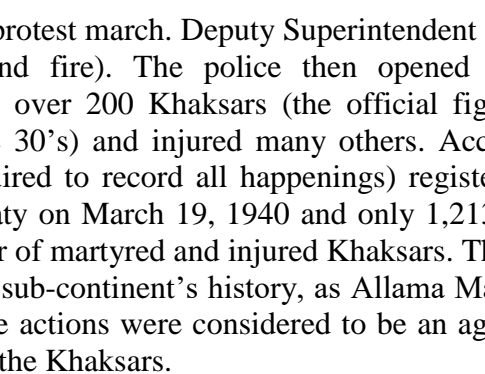
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In the afternoon of the black day, a heavy contingent of police, accompanied by army soldiers, raided the Khaksar Tehrik's Headquarters in Lahore. They threw tear-gas grenades and arrested Khaksars. One of Mashriqi's sons (Ehsanullah Khan Aslam) was injured by police and later died on May 31, 1940 (over 50,000 people attended his funeral). Allama Mashriqi, who was in Delhi at the time, was also arrested and taken to Vellore Central Jail, where he remained for almost two years without trial (upon his release, restrictions were imposed on his movements).

Following the massacre, heaps of bullet-riddled Khaksar bodies were heartlessly dragged and whisked away in police trucks. In an attempt to quell public reaction, no funeral processions were allowed for the martyred Khaksars and their bodies were buried in the darkness of night. News of the tragedy flashed around the world (from Australia to Germany to India to UK to the USA).

In order to minimize the tragedy in the public eye and justify the killings, the Government continued its massive propaganda campaign against the Khaksar Tehrik (which had begun even before the incident), utilizing both the press and other avenues to further this agenda. The media negatively portrayed the Khaksar Tehrik and tried to falsely brand the Khaksars as terrorists (even though the organization did not believe in killing innocent civilians and had no record of doing so) or fascists. For example, *The News* from (Adelaide) Australia published the headline "India's Three [over Five] Million Lawful Fascists" on Sep. 19, 1944. Despite the media cover-up, the public was outraged by the death of innocent Khaksars and the arrests of Mashriqi, his sons, and followers. The Viceroy of India Lord Linlithgow and Governor of Punjab Sir Henry

Duffield Craik did not issue any apologies. The Government's strong reaction and negative propaganda campaign confirmed that the Khaksar Movement had become the most powerful private army in British India. And the massacre only strengthened the public resolve to obtain freedom.

The Khaksar massacre had many similarities to the incident at Jallianwala Bagh. On April 13, 1919, a crowd of thousands gathered at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. Brigadier General

R.E.H. Dyer considered this a defiance of his earlier proclamation to the city banning public meetings and gatherings. Dyer ordered the troops of the British Indian Army to begin indiscriminately shooting. 1650 rounds were fired and many people were killed or injured. No authentic count of the dead or injured is available; the British estimate of the death toll was 379, while Indian estimates were much greater.



In both the Khaksar and Jallianwala Bagh massacres, the Government setup inquiry commissions to pacify the public. For the Khaksar incident, a High Court Inquiry Committee was formed under the presidentship of Sir Douglas Young, but the final report was *never released* for public consumption. In the case of Jallianwala Bagh, the Hunter Commission (under Lord Hunter) was formed and a report was later released.

In both incidents, the public was outraged. Following the massacre, the Khaksars continued with their civil disobedience movement in protest of the Government's actions. They used the Wazir Khan and Golden Mosques as their bases of resistance, but did not resort to any violent activities (such as destroying government property). In the case of Jallianwala Bagh, people reacted as well and some resorted to violent activity.

In closing, both the Khaksar massacre and the Jallianwala Bagh incident are of great historical importance. In the case of Jallianwala Bagh, the Indian Government and historians have kept the incident alive. Many dignitaries such as Queen Elizabeth, the Duke of Edinburgh, Prime Ministers Tony Blair and David Cameron, and London Mayor Sadiq Khan have visited the memorial at Jallianwala Bagh to pay obeisance. But in the case of the Khaksar massacre, the Governments of India, Pakistan, and Britain have not yet taken any concrete action - whether visiting the site of the heartbreaking tragedy to pay homage or building a memorial or members of parliament seeking the British government's formal apology. Filmmakers and historians also need to come forward to enlighten the public about this important incident. The fact of the matter is that the Khaksars laid their lives for the sake of freedom. And their blood was not in vain, as the Indian sub-continent obtained its independence when Pakistan and India emerged in 1947.

The incidents on March 19, 1940 and April 13, 1919 are amongst the greatest stains on the reputation of the British Empire. These brutal bloodbaths shook the people of the sub-continent and built tremendous resentment against the British government, ultimately leading to the fall of British rule in 1947.

Nasim Yousaf, a grandson of Allama Mashriqi, is an author and researcher who has spent two decades extensively researching the freedom movement of the Indian subcontinent, particularly the role of Allama Mashriqi and the Khaksar Tehrik in obtaining independence. His depth of knowledge on the subject comes not only from secondary sources, but also from the family members and Khaksars who were directly part of the freedom movement.

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